

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for recording an in-service date associated with an electronic device, comprising:

5           establishing an initial valid date as the current date for the device and maintaining the current date thereafter;

          responsive to determining that the device is in service, storing the current date in non-volatile storage as the in-service date; and

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          performing an action selected from:

          periodically monitoring the current date of the device to determine if the valid date has been altered after storing the in-service date; and

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          obtaining the in-service date from the non-volatile device with an external readout machine connected to the non-volatile storage.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein establishing the valid date comprises entering the  
20       current date during a power on sequence of the device.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein determining that the device is in service comprises determining that the device has been operating for a predetermined length of time after the valid date is set.

5 4. The method of claim 1, wherein storing the current date in non-volatile storage comprises storing the current date in a non-volatile storage device of a service processor of the device such that the stored date is inaccessible to a main processor of the device.

10 5. The method of claim 1, wherein periodically monitoring the valid date, comprises periodically determining if the valid date is earlier than the in-service date.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising, responsive to determining that the current date is earlier than the in-service date, issuing an error message.

15 7. The method of claim 6, further comprising, responsive to determining that the current date is earlier than the in-service date, enabling alteration of the in-service to match the current date.

20 8. The method of claim 7, wherein enabling the alteration includes requiring an operator of the device to enter an unlocking code.

9. The method of claim 8, requiring the operator to enter a unlocking code includes requiring the operator to obtain the unlocking code from a manufacturer of the device.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein obtaining the in-service date via the readout machine  
5 comprises executing an I2C compliant communication between the readout machine and the non-volatile memory.

11. A data processing system, comprising:

10 a main processor having access to a system memory;

a real-time clock configured to maintain the current date upon being initialized with a valid date;

15 non-volatile storage; and

a set of processor executable instructions at least a portion of which are contained in the system memory, wherein the instructions are configured to store the current date in the non-volatile storage as the in-service date automatically.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the system is further configured to issue an error message responsive to determining if the current date is altered after storing the in-service date.

5 13. The system of claim 11, wherein determining if the current date is altered after storing the in-service date comprises periodically monitoring the current date to determine if the current date is earlier than the in-service date.

10 14. The system of claim 11, wherein the contents of the non-volatile storage device are externally accessible.

15 15. The system of claim 14, further comprising an external readout device configured to access the contents of the non-volatile storage via a communication bus.

16 16. The system of claim 15, wherein the communication bus includes power signals such that the readout device can access the contents red

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the communication bus comprises an I2C communication bus.

18. The system of claim 11, further comprising a service processor connected to the main processor, wherein the non-volatile storage device comprises a non-volatile storage device of the service processor that is inaccessible to the main processor.

5 19. The system of claim 11, wherein the processor executable instructions are further configured to enable alteration of the in-service to match the current date responsive to determining that the current date is earlier than the in-service date.

10 20. The system of claim 19, enabling alteration of the in-service date requires an operator of the device to enter a unlocking code.

15 21. The system of claim 20, wherein requiring the operator to enter a unlocking code includes requiring the operator to obtain the unlocking code from a manufacturer of the device.